

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER KATHLEEN Q. ABERNATHY**

The Lifeline/Link-Up program, together with the Commission's other universal service support mechanisms, has helped ensure that the vast majority of Americans — nearly 95 percent — have access to telecommunications services at affordable rates. As successful as this program has been, however, there is room for improvement. Congress expressly directed the Commission to facilitate network access for low-income consumers, and an obvious way to promote that goal is to allow consumers to qualify for Lifeline and Link-Up support based on proof of low income. Our program-based eligibility standards remain useful, but the addition of an income-based standard should significantly improve our ability to target support to needy recipients.

While I support expansion of the eligibility criteria, I have also been a strong proponent of measures to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. In particular, we must balance the desire to boost enrollment against the need to impose appropriate certification and verification requirements. Especially with respect to income-based eligibility, where self-certification can lend itself to abuse, we must require supporting documentation. I am confident that the requirements we impose in this Order will protect the integrity of the program, yet are sufficiently flexible to avoid placing undue burdens on program participants. We have also taken steps to ensure that consumers are removed from the Lifeline rolls once they are no longer eligible, while establishing safeguards to prevent benefits from being denied erroneously.

I appreciate the hard work of the Joint Board on Universal Service, which laid the groundwork for this Order.